

Thomas County Courthouse  
Town square facing northeast,  
Broad Street  
Thomasville  
Thomas County  
Georgia

HABS No. GA-216

HABS  
GA.  
138-THOV1,  
1-

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Location: Town square facing northeast, Broad Street, Thomasville, Thomas County, Georgia

The history of the Thomas County Courthouse parallels the history of Thomas County, in that the existing structure is the third courthouse to be built on the site. Thomas County was established by legislative action on December 23, 1825. Five commissioners were charged with the responsibility of selecting a county seat, and in December 1826, formally selected Thomasville.

The first courthouse to be built was a small structure of split pine logs covered with pine siding, and was finished sometime prior to November of 1827. This was replaced by a brick courthouse, built by Samuel Austin in 1849. Badly damaged by a storm in 1853, the building remained in poor condition for more than two years.

In June 1855, a committee composed of R.H. Hardaway, E.R. Young, E. Seixas and W.J. Parnell "reviewed and carefully examined the Court House, have found the walls so much cracked as, in their opinion, to render it unsafe and dangerous. They do not believe it can be repaired but requires to be entirely rebuilt. They, therefore, recommend that it be entirely rebuilt with the best materials and in the most substantial manner".

On June 22, 1855, the Inferior Court of Thomas County offered the sum of fifty dollars for "the best plan with specifications that may be presented by any Architect for the building of a Court House in Thomasville". The notice specified that the building should be "60 feet square and three stories high, Court Room on the second floor, lower floor laid down with cement, Jury Room in the third floor, four offices below....", but the court would consider plans of a different layout. A committee originally made up of E. Seixas, M.B. Jones, Noah Parramore, James Seward and

W. Ponder, with D.M. McLean and R.H. Hardaway added shortly thereafter, was appointed to judge and pass upon the plans and specifications.

John Wind, the architect of Greenwood, Susina and Fair Oaks Plantations, was selected as the "Architect to draw a plan with specifications and working plan for a new Court House, said plan to be in the Clerk's Office by the first Monday in September next" (1855). On January 7, 1856 a contract was signed with H.C. and Wm. Bowen for the building of the new structure, at a cost of \$ 14,999.00. The contract called for the Bowens to "make, erect build and finish in a good substantial and workmanlike manner a three story brick Court House on the lot of land in Thomasville known as Court House Square and in the center of said lot".

Construction was to be finished by the fourth Monday in May, 1857. Detailed specifications for the building are available in the Records of the Thomas County Inferior Court of January 7, 1857. The Court House was designed to be 80 feet long by 48 feet wide, with an overall height of 48 feet from grade to the top of the eaves. The basement floor was to be 10 feet high, Court Room floor 18 feet and the third floor 16 feet. The floor of the basement was to be two feet above ground and finished in concrete, and the other two floors were to be heart pine. The thickness of the exterior walls varied from two feet eight inches at the basement level to one foot eight inches at the third floor, and were to be made of brick. The exterior finish of the walls was to be plaster, scribed into one by three foot rectangles to simulate stone blocks. Porticos were designed for the Broad Street and Jefferson Street facades, with brick columns and an entablature that continued

around the entire building.

The basement floor was divided into two pairs of two rooms, separated by a central hall. All interior walls were to be plastered and each pair of rooms was to have connecting iron doors for fire purposes. Each of the four rooms was provided with a fireplace with simple mantels, and had panelled wooden doors to the hall. The second floor was to be composed of the Court Room and two smaller rooms, each 14 by 15 feet. Each of the smaller rooms was to have a fireplace, with the Court Room being provided with two. A wood railing with turned ballusters separated the Court and Jury areas from the spectator area, which was to have stepped seats to provide a view of the proceedings. Two side stairways led to the Grand and Petite Jury Rooms on the third floor. Windows and doors were to be framed with floor length pilasters and angle blocks, and the ceiling, which contained a six foot diameter plaster center piece of "beads and reeds" was to be surrounded with a plaster cornice. A pulley was provided in the center of the ceiling for a chandelier. Six square interior columns with caps and entablatures were to support the third floor.

The third floor was to contain five rooms, including the two jury rooms and a "Town Hall Room" directly off the center stairs. Each of the four smaller rooms received a single fireplace, with two going to the "Town Hall", and all rooms were finished with the same trim as below.

Basement windows were to be twelve 12x18 inch glass panels, set  $\frac{3}{4}$ , the second floor windows eighteen 14x18 panels set  $\frac{6}{3}$  and the third floor windows fifteen 14x18 panels set  $\frac{5}{3}$ , all double-hung. Window openings on the exterior were simple rectangles, unadorned. A cupola was planned for the roof, setting on a square base and being octagonal with a round roof. A winding stairway

led to a platform in the middle of the cupola which was used as a viewing platform by citizens. The cupola was to be topped with an 18 inch brass ball, two and one-half feet above the roof.

The Court House walls, interior and exterior were to be painted white, with bronze green doors outside and varnished oak on the interior. Interior trim was to be buff, stairs and railings chocolate with white ballusters. The exterior stairs were to be granite.

Despite these well outlined specifications the construction of the Court House was not without its problems, and a variety of changes were authorized during its erection. The portico on the Jefferson Street side collapsed during construction, killing one worker and injuring another. This was never rebuilt, nor was the privy originally called for in the contract, and the contractors refunded part of their fee for not completing this work. The Bowens were paid for additional work, however, including a new vault, using brick instead of cement for the basement floor and finish plastering the interior. And on October 15, 1858 the Inferior Court ordered Lewis Heyman to pay the County \$ 678 for "deficiency in Copper Work on the Court House".

The Court House as designed by John Wind and built by the Bowen brothers was accepted as complete following repairs to the roof and a favorable report to the Inferior Court on September 28, 1858. A conjectural drawing prepared by Prince Jinright and reproduced in William W. Rogers' Ante-Bellum Thomas County<sup>1</sup>, shows

---

<sup>1</sup>Rogers, William W., Ante-Bellum Thomas County, 1825-1861, (Tallahassee, The Florida State University, 1963) p. 16

the Court House as a rectangular cube with a front portico supported by four large two story columns. A straight double stairway to the second floor is enclosed within the portico. The hip roof has an octagonal cupola with an open viewing area in the middle and there are four large corner chimneys.

The new building was occupied almost immediately, and quickly became the center of Thomasville's social as well as political life. The Inferior Court granted a petition to a group of leading citizens to "hold a Ball in the Concert-Hall of the Court House Nov. 23, 1858, free of charge it being the first Ball held in said hall. Hereafter all parties of a similar character or otherwise will be charged ten dollars for each and every night."

In October 1858 the Inferior Court ordered that a "good and substantial fence of iron" be put up around the square, and appointed a committee to have the Court House Square cleaned up and put in good order. With the exception of repairs to damage caused by a winter storm in 1860, little change to the Court House occurred until after the Civil War.

On April 26, 1887, the Clerk of the Superior Court condemned the County Commissioners for allowing the building to "go to pieces for lack of repairs", and asked that a tax be levied to raise \$4000 for its repair, saying that it "brings the blush of shame to the face of our own people and is a subject of ludicrous comment". In addition, an article appeared in the States-Enterprise of September 20, 1867, calling attention to the condition of the square... "the fence has been partially destroyed, and of late persons have adopted the habit of hitching horses to the shade

trees within the inclosure, and some of them, we are told, are already destroyed or much injured."

William Miller, builder of many of the fine Thomasville homes of this era, was put in charge of designing and planting the square in 1887. Work was completed, including the large fountain, by January 1889. Plant materials were donated by members of the community, and all work was completed through the voluntary contribution of materials, money and labor. This labor also included the use of the Chain Gang, provided by the City Council.

The Court House was restored in 1888, Eaves and Wase, Contractors. The front portico was filled in, and the columns removed. A rear addition was provided, and new windows and doors, including the existing elaborate Italianate window heads were added. In 1909 the clock was added. One story wings were added to the front and rear, filling in the corners, in 1918-19 and 1922, and the Classic Revival Annex to the rear was built in 1937, Prince J. Wright, Architect, Brenton and Sons, Contractors. At this time the Court House underwent its final renovation and with the exception of the blocking of a number of windows on the basement level, appeared as it does today.

Prepared by: Russell Wright  
December, 1969

Reviewed for HABS by: Druscilla J. Null  
September, 1983